

Forward to Ares
by Laura Stokes

The author, William Ebon, pen name, (Also known as William Black), told me this novel is about freedom. Freedom is a very broad term and idea. Freedom is about self-determination.

What institution or group of people impedes freedom for the protagonist of this story? Society in general and individuals everywhere, throughout history, have prevented freedom of self-expression and even tortured and murdered homosexuals because of their sexual orientation. This story is about the coming of age of a homosexual during the Great Depression in the infamous Dust Bowl of the United States and his quest for sexual freedom.

It is the story of his life from age two to age seventeen, aware of his homosexuality from his first memories, during one of the most repressive times in history and in one of the most mean-spirited places for this particular human development experience. Ares is the story of how this one young man determined his freedom of existence despite the overwhelming disapproval of his intrinsic sexuality. It is also a story of intrigue, as homosexuality in a disapproving environment is all about intrigue.

Synopsis

Ares is written in the third person about a homosexual's life experiences from age two to age seventeen. The location is the Dust Bowl, and the period is the Great Depression. The story begins in the farming town of Grass Prairie, Texas. It moves through a couple of other locations, ending in a college town, where the protagonist, Roy Grover, attends the local university for nearly two semesters as a drama student.

Two-thirds of the novel describes Roy Grover's family life on the prairie during his childhood. His family includes his father, mother, two sisters, and grandparents on his father's side. His parents are subsistence farmers who barely feed, clothe, and house their three children, of whom Roy is the youngest.

Their abject poverty is the source of embarrassment for every member of the family. Additionally, the small amount of social contact the parents and three children have with the outside world generally results in humiliation for the children because of their relative poverty compared to the local townspeople. The rare social contact also results in brutal bullying and beatings from the local boys because of his apparent femininity.

His grandparents grudgingly provide financial assistance to his parents on rare occasions and contribute to the dysfunctionality of his parents' marriage. The marriage dissolves during Roy's early adolescence after his mother accidentally kills her mother-in-law in a nasty fight.

At this point, Roy's mother, with Roy and his sisters, moves to a very small farming community fifty miles away. His mother has obtained employment as a teacher in a dilapidated one-room schoolhouse. Roy, his sisters, and his mother live in the back rooms of the wretched building.

Roy obtained employment at a local flour mill during the summer before his last year in high school and through his mother's contacts. Roy has his first sexual encounter at the end of the summer with his supervisor. The owner of the mill, a married family man of prominence in the community but probably a long-time lover of the supervisor, apparently determines that Roy has had relations with the supervisor.

Roy is not rehired the following summer upon graduation, possibly because of his sexual encounter.

He has to move to another city to stay with his married sister and gain employment there. Through his sister's contacts, he is to receive a relatively high-paying job through the government employment office. All he has to do is show up at the appointed time and meet with a certain person.

On the way to the government employment office, he has his second sexual experience of his life with the bus driver. They have sex in the back of the bus before the driver starts the rounds. Roy misses his ride in a prearranged trip via car to the employment office and misses his opportunity for the best job. He ends up with a lower paying, dirtier and harder job.

His sister and brother in law are disgusted with him for missing the appointment with the employment bureau, having been given a poor excuse from Roy on why he missed his ride. Subsequently, Roy's sister alienates Roy, in general, with her domineering behaviour and invasion of his privacy. Roy briefly considers moving out, but decides against it.

Roy meets several of the local community pillars through his sister, none of whom are supportive of Roy because they know of his relationship with the bus driver by one means or another. His sister and brother in law do not know of Roy's homosexual orientation or his sexual encounter with the bus driver.

His sister and brother in law leave the area before the end of the summer because the brother in law is relocated by the military. Roy has to move into a boarding house and make his own way. His mother occasionally sends him small sums of money. Roy becomes a drama student at the university located in the town.

Roy spends nearly all of the remainder of the novel attempting to locate and romantically reconnect with the bus driver, a married man with two children. As this lover's sex life is a well known fact in the local community, Roy is quickly pegged as a homosexual by the local, long time residents.

Other locally known homosexuals begin to interact with him at the university. He finds out, accidentally for the most part, that many of the drama department staff and students are homosexuals.

A couple of these homosexual students, although he has no sexual relations with them, intentionally pull him into their intrigue and set him up with the local dirty police. There are even two attempts to smear him publicly.

These homosexuals have fallen into the under world of heroin abuse. One of them shamelessly borrows money from Roy, never paying it back for obvious reasons, which results in Roy being penniless again, though he has worked two summers in a row. He gets another job which doesn't pay him for a month. He has to depend on his landlady at the boarding house to feed him. Fortunately, he has paid the rent for the semester up front before moving in.

The first event that smears him involves a relative of the heroin addict giving him a package to hold for the other homosexual. Roy's unacceptably nosy land lady opens the package, carefully located in his briefcase in his room, and finds heroin in the package. Roy is unaware of the contents of the package, as he hasn't opened it and is likewise unaware the land lady has opened it.

As the landlady can't admit to nosing into his personal things, she sets about making him miserable so he will leave on his own, as she mistakenly thinks he knows the contents. Finally, she has to let him know about the contents of the package and her opening it, because she has given it to the police. Roy is stunned.

He is forced to find another boarding house as she has successfully run him out - she quit feeding him or heating his room in the winter and finally steals his key from him and won't let him in except

to move his bags out.

On the same day Roy moves out of the boarding house, the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor. The young men at the university either begin volunteering for the draft or being drafted, if they are nineteen or older. The university considers changing from two long semesters and one short summer term to three condensed terms per year to get students educated faster.

A faction of the local police are running the heroin distribution in the area for the President of the University that Roy attends. These dishonest policemen are also homosexuals. This same homosexual for which the package was initially intended was also shot in the leg the year before by Roy's bus driver lover. Apparently, a distribution turf war amongst the heroin dealers is under way. These policemen set Roy up once the landlady gives them the package of heroin.

A "John", secretly one of these local dirty police, picks Roy up outside a drama play practice and takes Roy to a hotel room, after treating him to a sumptuous meal at an expensive restaurant. Roy is so hungry by this point that he considers prostitution just to be able to eat.

The hotel room is bugged as Roy has his third sexual encounter of his life at age seventeen. The dirty police have bugged more than one homosexual encounter in this hotel room. Still, on another time, as he found out later, the bugged sexual episode was also associated with heroin use. Roy refuses an overt offer of heroin in this hotel room.

At the end of the novel, numerous events happen at once. Roy's other sister, Rena, and her husband, a military psychiatrist newly assigned to the university town, arrive in town as a surprise as Roy is rehearsing the lead male part in the university's play. The Dean of the drama department is fired, students are on strike, and the President of the University takes over as the Dean of the Drama Department.

The new dean summons the gay drama students to his office with post card notifications sent to their boarding houses, thus publicly humiliating them. In the meeting with the dean, these students are removed from the play and expelled from the university. Homosexual professors in the drama department begin to look for other jobs and to leave the university.

One of these homosexual students, who is also a heroin addict, has stored a trunk in Roy's room against Roy's wishes. He did so while Roy was gone from the boarding house, but with the knowledge of the boarding house owners and other boarders. Rena's husband helps Roy dispose the contents of the trunk at night before anyone can find the contents in Roy's room. Roy removes the trunk because he has become frightened by the recent events at the University and the treatment of gays as well as because of his suspicions of the ulterior intent of the owner of the trunk.

Roy admits to his brother in law, a military psychiatrist newly assigned to the University town and medical school, that he is homosexual. His brother in law is disgusted and orders him to get treatment for his sickness.

In the alley behind the boarding house and at midnight, the brother in law then opens the trunk and finds the contents of the trunk are transvestite clothing. He accuses Roy of being a transvestite, which Roy honestly denies. Roy stuffs the incriminating clothing in a garbage can in the alley in the wee hours of the morning, then puts the empty trunk back in his room.

The next morning, the newspapers expose certain expelled university students as homosexuals and heroine addicts. The police, the dean/president of the university and his wife, and the attorney of the homosexual heroine addict that owns the trunk are all lined up in their vehicles in the alley behind Roy's boarding house. Roy's sister, Rena, and her husband drive up in front of the boarding house. They have read the newspaper and gotten the association of the addict owner of the trunk

with Roy.

In the front yard, Roy tells his brother in law he won't undergo treatment for his homosexuality and nearly gets in a fight with his brother in law in the front yard. A very public scene does then ensue in the front yard between the police, the attorney, Roy and his brother in law regarding the police taking the trunk without a warrant. The dean and his wife remain in their car in the alley, rebuffing attempts by Roy's sister, Rena, to talk to them. Roy's roommate throws the trunk out the second story window, and the dirty cops pounce on it.

The dirty cops rip the empty trunk to pieces trying to find drugs in the lining. They find nothing. The cops, the attorney, and the dean and his wife leave in their respective vehicles.

Back in the boarding house, Roy gets a call on the phone in the hallway from his mother. His mother relates that his other brother in law has died during surgery. His sister Rena, her husband, and Roy are to drive to the funeral to be held in a few days.

As Rena and her husband leave the boarding house, the landlord throws Roy's things—rapidly stuffed into Roy's suitcases and a box while Roy was on the phone—out the front door. Another boarder physically lifts Roy out of the house and dumps him onto the front porch. Roy is locked out with his things, and all the boarders and the landlord inside the house openly sneer at him through the windows.

Roy's homosexuality is now public knowledge due to his association with the heroin addict and his trunk since the addict was exposed as a homosexual in the morning papers. The landlord tells him that the other parents would not allow Roy to continue to live there with their sons, as Roy was a problem that could affect their children.

Roy is scheduled to meet with the dean that afternoon, knowing he will be expelled from the university in that meeting and knowing that a taped recording of his homosexual encounter in the hotel room will be played in that meeting. Roy leaves his luggage in a corner on the front porch and boards a bus to find one of his drama teachers.

He knows this drama teacher is a lesbian. She is leaving the university for a position she has obtained in another state to produce a play. He wants a job from her as an actor in that play.

On his way to finding this play director, Roy finally meets the bus driver face to face and alone. The bus driver rejects Roy completely and totally. Roy finally understands that he is not only rejected but also “connects the dots.”

The bus driver and the dirty cops are all part of a group of heroin distributors associated with the President of the University. The president of the university was discrediting and firing or expelling from the university any homosexual that could reveal his heroin distribution trade.

After the previous lover has walked away, Roy quickly locates the lesbian play director. He successfully lands a job with her boss, who is in the teacher's apartment as the two women are packing to leave town. All three leave town together on an airplane.

Roy lands a job in the play because he is a talented actor and because all the potential adult male actors in the theater, his competition, have been drafted into World War II. Roy, being seventeen, will have a job as an actor in male leads for nearly two years because the draft age is nineteen.

Roy leaves behind a narrow-minded university community and family and begins his life under his control, flatly refusing to deny his essential homosexuality. He is thrilled as the plane lifts off the runway at the very end of the novel.

